No 1

# SPECIAL INSIGHTS INTO SADHANA

from
Early Morning Meditation Talks




Swami Chidananda

A DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY PUBLICATION

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*Published By*

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1. The All-Conquering Power
2. Sadhana Means Active Effort
3. The Right Moment to Begin Anew
4. Live in the Light
5. The Call of Shanmukha

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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This special series of eight booklets is being published between September 1996 and September 1997 in honour of the 80th Birthday Anniversary of H.H. Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj, the President of the Divine Life Society.

Each booklet contains several of his early morning meditation talks given on special spiritual occasions in the sacred Samadhi Hall of the holy founder of the Divine Life Society and Sivananda Ashram, H.H. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj. The series of eight booklets covers the entire year of special occasions and festivals celebrated in the Ashram.

The talks contain penetrating insights into the meaning and purpose of *sadhana* as Swamiji takes advantage of these occasions to point out the fundamentals required for success in the spiritual quest such as devotion to the goal, discrimination, obedience to the Guru, faith in God and oneself, and a divinely lived life.

The spiritual advice and encouragement contained in these booklets will be an inspiration and help to earnest spiritual seekers throughout the world.

THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

# PREFACE

The whole year for the Hindu is a continuous observance of some sacred day of worship or other. The year is completely built around a great many days of sacred worship of various expressions of the one non-dual Divine Reality.

Each month is significant for the presence of some important day of divine worship. So, from beginning to end, life becomes God-oriented; it becomes devotion filled. Life becomes based upon worship.

The holiness and sanctity of life and actions of the followers of the Vedic religion is insured by this great wisdom-based approach to life. All the twelve months become a composite period of adoring the Divine Reality around which the entire life of the individual revolves.

*Swami Chidananda*

***"Ultimately <u>sadhana</u> means victory. Yoga-abhyasa means victory. Spiritual life means victory!***

***—Swami Chidananda***

# THE ALL-CONQUERING POWER

Radiant Atman! Beloved children of the Divine, assembled together in Gurudev's presence in this Samadhi Hall of His holy Ashram on the banks of Divine Mother Ganga in sacred Uttarakhand! *Sarvam vishnumayam jagat* (The whole world is pervaded by Lord Vishnu); *Sarvam khalvidam brahma* (All this is verily Brahman—these are statements you find in the scriptural utterances of *satya sanatana vaidika dharma* (the true, eternal Vedic *dharma,* religion) that you call Hinduism.

There is a denomination, a *sampradaya* (sect) of Hinduism, a certain philosophical school, which equates everything with a supreme, inexpressible cosmic power. And that cosmic power is envisaged, is regarded, worshipped and adored as the great universal Mother, the cosmic power whom they call Sakti, Para-Sakti. It is the primal power which was before anything else came into being, which alone was. It is *adisakti,* the primal power; *parasakti,* the transcendental power; *mahasakti,* the great imponderable power. Whatever we see in this universe is but a manifestation of That—*sarvam saktimayam jagat* (The whole world is pervaded by the Universal Power).

Everything that we have in the form of any force, strength, power, is Her manifestation within and without. If we have strength in our limbs, it is because of Her presence within us. If we are able to think, the power of thought is Her manifestation within us. If we

have the power of reasoning, intellect, it is the manifestation of the Cosmic Mother. If we have the power to feel and to comprehend the feelings of others, then it is the manifestation of Mother. If we have the power to recall long forgotten events from our memory bank and bring them out, that power is an aspect of the cosmic power of the Mother Who dwells within us.

She is everything: physical strength, power to think, power to will, power to reason, logic, power to feel, to remember, power to visualise the past, present and future. It is the power of the Mother that makes the river to flow, wind to blow, fire to burn, great machines to work. She is the biting power of the mosquito, the hauling power of the elephant. *Sarvam saktimayam jagat* (The whole world is pervaded by the Universal Power).

A man may have vast wealth but be a miser and never make use of it. If he never invests his wealth he will ever remain a poor man. His wealth will not develop and multiply. He cannot become wealthier and wealthier because he is not making use of what he has been given. He drags on a miserable existence. He does not even want to replace his old clothes. Not that he has no power, but he does not use it. On the other hand, an entrepreneur, a commercial magnate, goes on investing and continuously keeps working and there is no end to his prosperity. He goes on progressing day after day, expands his empire. Why? Because he has put to use what he has. He has utilised, applied in a practical manner in his life, what he possesses.

Similarly, it is not that we do not possess, but if we do not apply, we remain where we are. The secret of success in any field of endeavour is industry and application and, above all, perseverance in this industry and application. You take up something, apply yourself to it, and don't stop until you reach the goal. Keep on, persevere. Continuous effort is the key to ultimate achievement. This is something that both Patanjali Maharshi and Lord Krishna, each in their own way, state very explicitly. Lord Krishna states it in the sixth chapter of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita and Patanjali Maharshi expounds this principle when he deals with the fifth *anga* (limb) of Ashtanga Yoga, namely *dharana* or concentration.

Perseverance means not giving up, but with a calm, serene determination pursuing till the end. And suppose the goal is not attained at the end of that perseverance? That is not at all important, for the one who has thus persevered has succeeded. That person has achieved success. Success is not in getting something. Success lies in not giving up. Success lies in perseverance till the end. That is the greatest achievement in life. Yoga is no exception to it. *Bhakti* is no exception to it. The attempt to control the mind is no exception to it. The attempt to achieve concentration is no exception to it. The attempt to lead a good life is no exception to it. The attempt to control our senses, to attain victory over negative habits and cultivate and establish noble, positive habits is no exception to it. All yield to the mysterious power of persevering effort. It is an all-conquering force. It is an all-conquering force because it is a direct application of

Divine Mother's presence in us. Nothing can stand before it. Everything yields to it, provided we persevere with utmost regularity.

In many places in rural India there is no machinery. So if they want to dig a well they use pickaxes and crow-bars. In the beginning only the surface of the earth is disturbed, no impression is made. But they go on digging, digging, digging in the same place and soon there is a large hole getting deeper and deeper. Finally, due to their persevering effort and the application of strength exercised continuously, they have water. It may be at 12 feet, 15 feet, 20 feet or even more. But they got what they were after, even though originally it was not visible. They had only guessed that it must be there. And so it has nothing but the sheer result of persevering effort applied in one direction, with one objective, that brought about this consummation.

Each human individual, each *jivatma,* has been given the ability to attain anything that he wants and the power for it—physical, mental, moral and intellectual. The only thing is, you should have enthusiasm, you should have aspiration, you should have a desire. Then everything becomes possible, because you have been endowed with this strength which is not an ordinary strength. It is a manifestation of the supreme Cosmic Power.

There is a hymn to the Divine Mother in the Durga Saptasati: *ya devi sarvabhuteshu buddhi-rupena samsthita, namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namah*—I bow to that supreme Divine Mother, the

Goddess Who resides within me, Who exists within me as the power of the intellect; I bow to Her again and again and again. *Ya devi sarvabhuteshu smriti-rupena samsthita, namastasyai, namastasyai namastasyai namo namah*—I bow to the supreme Goddess, the Cosmic Power Who resides within me as the power of memory; I bow to Her again and again and again. Thus this particular hymn identifies the presence of the Cosmic Power in the individual in his various aspects, physical, psychological, etc.

Therefore, the power is with us. If we are not misers, if we apply or invest it by having a certain keen aspiration, by putting forth effort for an objective, by persevering in that objective with calm determination and keeping up this perseverance with utmost regularity, it yields results. That is the teaching.

Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj was very positive about this in his guidance to us. He always used to say: "Do not despair, there is nothing impossible for you. Everything is possible if you keep on persevering. Do not yield. Do not give up." And our scriptures abound in certain supreme examples like Bhagiratha, Savitri, Dhruva and others. These illustrations all try to point out to us, by example, what is possible.

You must benefit out of this truth about yourself. Reflect upon it. Know that you have within yourself the power to attain whatever you aspire after, provided you fulfil the conditions of perseverance, regularity in perseverance and a determination to persevere onward till the end. God bless you all!

## SADHANA MEANS ACTIVE EFFORT

Radiant Immortal Atman! Beloved and blessed children of the Divine! All of you are proceeding towards a definite goal. What does this proceeding towards a definite goal mean? What should it mean to you, imply to you? And in what way should it manifest in your thought, word and deed?

What should *sadhana* mean to you? How should this *sadhana* manifest in your life, in your thoughts, words and deeds? If spiritual life is the supreme ideal and if Yoga *sadhana* is engaged in in order to reach the goal, the *lakshya* of Yoga, then what should *sadhana* mean, what should the life of Yoga and *yoga-abhyasa* mean to you, imply to you? For unless you know what *sadhana,* Yoga and *yoga-abhyasa* should mean to you, imply to you, and how they should manifest in your life, how can you engage in true *sadhana* or *yoga-abhyasa*? It cannot be effective.

Do our scriptures throw any light upon this very important and vital question? Yes, they do, not in some hidden, occult sense, some esoteric sense which will have to be expounded by subtle thinkers and great philosophers trying to make meaning out of very subtle, mystical and ambiguous truths uttered in a high-flown way. Rather, directly, plainly, categorically, unambiguously, unmistakably, scriptures do have something to say about this vital question. What is it?

Rama had a goal: He wanted to bring Sita back. Ravana also had a goal: he wanted to keep Sita. Ravana

did not want to give Sita to Rama even though people like his brother Vibhishana and even Mandodari, his wife, persuaded, begged, prayed and advised him to do so. And so, Ravana, in order to achieve his goal, fought in as many ways as it is possible to fight. And Rama, to attain His goal, also engaged himself in the battle—He fought. They did not lie down in an easy chair and ask someone else to do something for them. They went themselves. They asked the help of people. They consulted others. They gathered armies. They did all that was necessary to do, at least within the limits of their knowledge. To use an English expression: they left no stone unturned.

What to say of superior human beings like Prince Rama, a scion of the royal family, even animals—monkeys and bears—also tried their best to do everything. When they were helpless, they consulted each other! "What should we do now?" They sat down, put their heads together, thought about it and tried to see what they could do. So they also exercised their intelligence. They did not sit back.

When they had done all that they could, their very best, and could not go further, even then they did not give up. They further enquired, thought and reflected. Why? Because of their sincerity. They wanted to do it—really, truly, genuinely, authentically—and, therefore, they did everything they could. They exercised their strength and they fought. They did not simply allow the opposition to overcome them, saying, "What to do? Fate." No! If there is opposition they said, "we have to

overcome. We must use our strength. We must be active. We must be dynamic. We must do something about it." Doing is *sadhana.* Be up and doing.

For the past four days, you have been hearing the Devi Mahatmyam being read. Devi is a great Being, *parabrahman sakti.* By simply thinking, by *humkara,* She had the power to destroy all Her enemies. She could do that; but no, She used all the weapons, not one weapon, but many kinds of weapons. And She also fought. That means She was vigorously active in trying to overcome the opposition and reach the goal.

When the *devas* fought and failed, they took recourse to a higher power. They went and prayed. "Pease help us. We are not able. Come to our aid. Fight on our behalf."

***"Sarva-mangala-mangalye sive sarvartha-sadhike,***
***Saranye tryambake gauri narayani namostute.***

***Srishti-sthiti-vinasanam saktibhute sanatani,***
***Gunasraye gunamayi narayani namostute.***

***Saranagatadinarta paritrana parayane,***
***Sarvasyartihare devi narayani namostute."***

("Salutation be to You O Narayani, O You Who are the good of all good, O auspicious Devi, Who accomplish every object, the giver of refuge, O three-eyed Gauri!

Salutation be to You, O Narayani, You Who have the power of creation, sustenance and destruction and

are eternal. You are the substratum and embodiment of the three *gunas*.

"Salutation be to You, O Narayani, O You Who are intent on saving the dejected and distressed that take refuge under You. O You, Devi Who remove the sufferings of all!")

Within these three slokas they took shelter. She is the shelter—*saranagata dinarta paritrana parayani.* She helps those who take recourse to Her. If you do not take recourse, She is where She is, She is what She is, and you remain where you are. It is only when you take recourse, She says; "OK, you are asking Me, I will do what you ask. I will come to your rescue." So, even there activity is necessary. You must actively go and seek the aid of the Divine, within and without, in all Its manifestations.

It is this that constitutes *sadhana,* this active effort to overcome obstructions, to progress along the path and reach the Goal. *Yoga-abhyasa* means active effort to obtain the *lakshya,* to reach the Goal. *Sadhana* means active effort to obtain that which is possible of being obtained through effort. So, it means continuous effort in the right direction. And it means a willingness to keep up this continuous effort. It means, not a negative unproductive attitude of approach, but a positive, ever-willing attitude of engaging in active effort.

What will be the form of the active effort? The form will be that which is right and suitable for overcoming that which opposes, that which is suitable for achieving the Goal, that which takes you nearer and

nearer in the direction you wish to move. It will be that which is intelligently chosen, which is through and through common sense. You must use common sense. God has given you intelligence. You must apply both your intelligence and common sense and be thus actively engaged in moving towards the Goal.

This active effort is the essence of *sadhana* and it should be throughout. *Sadhana* means active effort. *Yoga-abhyasa* means active effort. It may be mental effort. It may be verbal effort. It may be physical effort. It may be all three combined. It may be a fourth kind of effort which is not covered by mental, physical and verbal effort. But it is all effort.

If you want to do some silly thing such as indulging in some pleasure, how much effort you will do, how much you will weigh the pros and cons to discover how somehow or other you may be able to satisfy your senses and please your mind. All night and day you engage in doing it. The same thing should be applied in the direction of Yoga.

But, if on the contrary you are only engaged in actively seeking sense pleasures, in satisfying yourself, in hunting for selfish fulfilment, then active effort will be present, but it will be in the wrong direction. It will not produce any concentration or ecstasy or higher consciousness. It will not, because it is being done in a wrong direction.

So, the effort must be in the right direction. And it should not be accompanied by self-sabotage. It should not be accompanied by working against yourself in

another direction. If in one area you are vigorously working for yourself in the right direction but in another area you go on working in the opposite direction, then naturally your right effort will be unproductive, because you are undoing what you are trying to do.

Therefore, active effort should be accompanied by earnestness and sincerity. It should be accompanied by common sense and ordinary intelligence—not extraordinary intelligence which is not in the possession of all people. We take the normal human being; a *sadhaka* is a normal person. And from where one is one starts, for that is one's equipment at that point in time. Therefore, with common sense, enquiry and reflection and with whatever intelligence God has endowed you with, intelligently make active effort to overcome that which stands in the path, within and without, and move steadily towards the Goal.

This is what all scriptures show. Rama exercised this active effort, and He also fought a battle. Devi also keeps on fighting battle after battle. The Mahabharata shows the same thing, the exercise of active effort. You have to overcome that which is contrary to your ideal and goal. And you must keep on, keep on and not get disheartened, not get frustrated. There were times when even Lord Rama got a little perturbed because everything He used against Ravana proved of no avail. Then a sage comes and tells Him: "No, no, no, this is not the way. Come along, buck up!" Then he gives Him a little help. That means that the emphasis is always upon the positive.

Gurudev was very fond of the Latin expression *nil desperandum.* Many times he used to say, "Do not despair." For where there is despair, there is no hope. Interestingly enough, the three great cardinal virtues within the Christian theological context are faith, hope and charity. Much emphasis is put upon hope and you know what the reason is. Hope is necessary, because the spiritual life, *sadhana* and *Yoga-abhyasa* are not easy. It is not as if you can just put a coin in a slot-machine and out comes a fruit. It is not like that. There is no assurance of quick results and fruits. Ultimate fruits are what we are aiming at, not immediate successes. If we keep on our effort, then the ultimate fruit is assured.

This is the truth that scriptures try to draw our attention to in respect to our spiritual life. This is what scriptures, in their very clear and unmistakable way, say. Not in any subtle, hidden, occult and esoteric way, but plainly, calling a spade a spade. They put before us this plain fact, the plain truth: We have to keep on making effort. *Sadhana, Yoga-abhyasa,* spiritual life, mean using common sense, intelligence and keeping up effort to reach the goal which we have set for ourselves. Every scripture we touch has this common universal message even though they may vary in certain details. The basic central message is plain for anyone to see.

If we can see this basic, central message, accept it, apply it, and thus engage in *sadhana* with common sense and intelligence, then victory will be ours, because it heads towards victory.

In all the big North Indian cities, these ten days will end in the day of victory. Rama becomes the victor; His efforts give Him fruit. Similarly, after nine days of worship, the tenth day is celebrated as the great victory of the Divine Mother over all that opposes Her. *Vijaya,* the name itself is significant. People greet each other; they exchange greeting cards. Why? It is rejoicing at the victory. The great experience of victory is the assured culmination. You are meant for it.

*Sadhana* therefore means victory. *Yoga-abhyasa* means victory ultimately. Spiritual life means victory ultimately. God bless you with such a victory! May the Divine Mother give you the intelligence, the common sense and the effort to attain this victory!

## THE RIGHT MOMENT TO BEGIN ANEW

Homage unto the Supreme Reality, the source, the origin, the support, the substratum, the goal and the fulfilment, the alpha and the omega, the beginning, the middle and the end, the consummation, of all beings, of all existence, Who is the one and only reality worth striving for! Homage unto that Being in Whom you all live, in Whom you all move, in Whom you all have your being totally, your physical being, your mental and intellectual being and your real, innermost spiritual being.

Totally and literally you exist in God, Who exists everywhere and Who exists ever and ever more There can be no other possibility than that we all exist in that Supreme Being, for He is forever and He is

everywhere—here, now and always—for He is the great Reality. He is infinite in space, eternal in time and beyond time. Therefore, there is no other possibility but that we exist in Him, we live in Him, we move in Him, we have our being in Him. He is our all-in-all within and without.

The recognition of this fact is the beginning of spiritual life. The experiencing of this fact is the end of spiritual life. And the endeavour to constantly grow into an ever-progressive awareness of this fact is the very essence of spiritual life. Ultimately, it is the awareness of this fact that is the purpose of all spiritual practices, whether it be *japa* or prayer or contemplation or study or fellowship.

When one begins to recognise this fact, this truth of ones being, one's spiritual awakening commences. When one begins to strive and endeavour to grow in the awareness of this fact, one's spiritual life becomes active and progresses. When one experiences this and becomes established in this experience, then one's spiritual life culminates.

*Brahma satyam jaganmithya* (God alone is real, the world is unreal) is the beginning of spiritual life. *Brahma-abhyasa* (practice), *brahma chintan* (reflection), is the essence of spiritual life. *Sarvam khalvidam brahma* (All this is verily Brahman) is the ultimate culmination of spiritual life.

There is no spiritual life unless a soul suddenly recognises that everything that is seen, heard, tasted, smelt, touched, thought about or perceived does not

constitute the Reality. For everything changes, passes and vanishes. The recognition that there is something beyond, something behind, the unchanging behind the everchangeful, begins one's quest after knowing more about It, one's quest after understanding more about It. So one seeks, one questions, one begins to investigate.

Loving adorations to the spiritual presence of our Holy Master, who has created a vast body of awakening, illuminating spiritual literature, practical spiritual literature, proclaiming this fact, compelling us to recognise this great truth, inducing us and inspiring us to endeavour to become aware of this truth and ultimately helping us, illumining us, and bestowing, upon us this great experience that we may become forever blessed. All this and more he is doing for the present global human society, working in their midst in the form of his inspiring and illuminating wisdom teachings. He is present, he is active, he is dynamically working in the form of his wisdom teachings.

The ancient illumined seers and sages exist, powerfully exist, and forcefully call upon us to awake, arise and become illumined. They work within us as the Upanishadic teachings, as the wisdom of the Upanishads. That is why they are immortal. As names and forms they have become ancient. As forms they have vanished. But as a spiritual light, as a spiritual force, as an awakening power, they very much dwell amongst us, they very much work amongst us and they are available to each and every sincere seeking soul wishing to draw inspiration, to enter the path and to

proceed towards the Goal. This is the truth. They are Immortal, they are timeless. Therefore, they are sometimes called *nitya siddhas,* the eternal spiritual masters of mankind.

And today, being the first day after the Vijaya Dasami, a day of great commencements, a day of new beginnings, a day of entering with greater vigour into the life spiritual, a day to impart a fresh impetus to our questing and striving and *sadhana,* is indeed the right moment for each one of you to strive to enter deeper into these truths about the spiritual life. Because until and unless we rid ourselves of the error that what is visible is the real, is the truth, and become awakened to the fact that what is unseen is the great reality, that what is invisible is more the fact that what is visible, until and unless this new awareness is created and becomes the basis of our day-to-day living, our spiritual life will still lack authenticity, our spiritual life will still fall short of being the genuine thing.

When the outer is felt to be the solid reality, the important thing, then the inner becomes something remote, more a concept than a fact. This is undesirable. This is not as it should be. Therefore one needs to correct one's perspective and change one's inner awareness, begin to live with a new consciousness and have a right sense of values. And this is the right time.

One well-seasoned and veteran spiritual person has decided to commence as from today a 40 days' retreat of relative seclusion, silence, intense contemplation and inner spiritual *sadhana.* Now, when a person who has

been into spiritual life and practice for perhaps nearly 50 years, knows that this is an auspicious point in time to make a good resolution, to make a good commencement, and enters into a practical course of a spiritual *sadhana*, what about lesser people, raw people, relatively newer into the spiritual life? How much more should be their eagerness to make use of each and every opportunity that presents itself to bring about a fresh impetus into their spiritual life, to go ahead with greater vigour, to enter into a greater depth of *sadhana!* Their need is greater. There is no real need to pour water into a full pot, but an empty or half full vessel needs to be filled.

Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji fasted on *ekadasi* all his life until the year 1960. It was only in the year 1960 that a very eminent physician from New Delhi, who was also the personal physician of the President of India, insisted that Gurudev stop this habit of fasting because of his diabetes. So up until the last few years of his life, Gurudev maintained this discipline. When such great souls, for some reason known to themselves, adhere to such disciplines, it is an indication, a pointer to us. We should emulate them and try to learn from them how very necessary it is for us to be serious, to be earnest and to be practical in our spiritual life.

On this auspicious day, may the grace of the Divine and the choicest benedictions and blessings of beloved and worshipful Holy Master enable us to understand the essence of spiritual life and grant us the inner spiritual power to forge ahead towards the Goal

Supreme. May we be blessed with all success in this great life of ascending from unrealities into the Reality, from darkness into Light, from death and mortality into immortality and everlasting life! God bless you all!

## LIVE IN THE LIGHT

Homage unto Thee, Thou Universal Presence Divine, Thou Who art the origin and source of all existence, the substratum and support of all existence and the ultimate fulfilment and goal of all existence. To Thee, worshipful homage of this servant of the Master in the Master's divine spiritual presence in the sacred Samadhi Shrine of his holy Ashram.

Loving adorations to Thee, O Gurudev, thou who art the light of our lives. Thou hast shown us light in the darkness of our spiritual self-forgetfulness, in the darkness of our ignorance of our divine mission in life, and thou hast illumined our life with a light of the Divine Life ideal of living, being and doing.

Radiant Atman! Beloved *sadhakas* and devotees of the Lord assembled here! Let us offer our heart's gratitude to the Divine, the Cosmic Being, Who has conferred upon us the rare and blessed status of being thinking, feeling and reasoning human beings upon this planet earth. For this great blessedness, let us offer our gratitude by applying this great gift in the highest, noblest and most sublime manner until the last breath is in the body.

And let us offer our heart's gratitude to Gurudev who is to us the ideal, both for our own subjective

inwardness of conduct, character, thinking and feeling as well as for our attainment, that of a *jivanmukta,* a *jnani,* a *parama bhakta,* a Yogi established in the inner Self, inner consciousness of Self-awareness, and a *karma yogi par excellence,* a being filled with universal love, compassion, kindness and dynamic goodness. He has thus placed himself before us as a manifold ideal for our living, both in our subjective inwardness as well as our endeavour upon the outer field of our day-to-day living.

Children of Light! The sacred invocation that has come down to us from times immemorial is *tamaso ma jyotir gamaya*—From darkness enable us to ascend into the Light. That we should not enter into darkness but should move towards the Light is made abundantly clear by the Isopanishad. We should ever face the Light. We should live in the Light, because we are of the Light.

If we do not make Light our supreme destiny, if we do not make ourselves votaries of that Light of lights beyond all darkness, then we run the danger of going from darkness to greater darkness—*andham tamah pravisanti ye avidyam upasate* (They who worship *avidya* alone fall into blinding darkness). Those who direct their attention to that which is ephemeral, fleeting, that which is not the Eternal Reality, they enter into blinding darkness. For, if we make all our life a pursuit of the lesser knowledge, which only increases vanity and confirms the error of outer appearances being the reality, then we enter into deeper darkness.

Worshipping either *avidya* or *apara vidya* (lesser knowledge) is fraught with danger. Both lead from

darkness to denser darkness. Therefore to ever strive for *para vidya,* the greater knowledge, the supreme knowledge that illumines, enlightens and liberates—that should be our life. We must ever move towards that great Light of lights that is beyond all darkness, attaining the region of which one does not return to this realm of pain and death and rebirth. *Yadgatva na nivartante taddhama paramam mama* (Going where they do not return—that is My supreme abode).

That should be well pondered. That should be reflected upon. That should be meditated upon, and that should be attained. Hence it is that we pray that our intellects may be illumined—to bring light into the darkness of *avidya* that prevails within. It is perhaps to remind us every day that our life should always be a continuous striving to bring light into the darkness.

And it was to perhaps remind us to never forget this great task, to ever keep before us this great ideal, that our wise ancestors have conceived the festival of lights, Dipavali, where the darkness of the new moon night, *amavasya,* is illumined by millions and millions of bright twinkling lights from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari where the whole of India would be one great light if you were to observe it from a satellite. It is to ever remind us that we should make our life a constant process of moving from darkness into light, or making ourselves a living light of the Divine.

If He is *paramjyotih svarupa paramatma* (having the nature of Supreme Light and is the Supreme Self) and we are His *amsas,* as the Lord Himself states in the

Gita, then we are also *paramjyotis* in a lesser way. We are the transcendental light in our essential nature. Our true identity is light and not darkness. Our true identity is effulgence and not gloom. Our true identity is radiance.

Therefore, let us arouse within ourselves the light of this consciousness and be as a lamp unto darkness. That was the parting admonition of the great enlightened sage, Buddha: "Be, O Bhikhus, each one of you as a light unto yourselves and as a lamp unto the feet of others."

We reiterate that admonition at this moment. We reinvoke a special awareness of the invocation: *tamaso ma jyotirgamaya.* Let us strive diligently by all the powers at our disposal to ever make ourselves a centre of radiant, divine effulgence, a centre of shining character and sublime good conduct, a centre of awakened spirituality and a dynamic manifestation of that awakened spirituality in the form of a divinely lived life. For that is the great need of this benighted world of ours, more than half of which has rejected God, rejected the scriptures as superstition and rejected this quest of the human spirit towards the Supreme Light. It has instead taken to hedonism—eat, drink and be merry, have a good time, satisfy the senses and fulfil desires.

That is the great darkness—a total misconception regarding the very fundamental purpose and meaning of life on earth, and, therefore, a headlong plunge into the wrong direction. And the deplorable results, the widespread ignorance and confusion brought about by

this blind pursuit of pleasure is everywhere to be seen in the human world upon this planet earth today.

Will you not be lights in this darkness that is spreading over the human world? Will you not make use of the supreme privilege of *mahapurusha samsrayah* (protecting care of a perfected sage) that God has blessed you with and be each one of you a shining light, and strive humbly and simply to be a lamp unto the feet of others? Awaken the light within and let it radiate through your every thought, word and action. And thus make this life a purposeful and a glorious ascent into the fullness of light where one becomes an enlightened being, an illumined being, shining with the light of spiritual consciousness, divine consciousness.

That is the goal. That is to be striven after. That is your great privilege and good fortune to be able to strive towards that attainment. That is your great blessedness. Avail of this privilege. Avail of this golden opportunity. Avail of this blessedness. Avail of this supreme good fortune. Turn away from darkness and move towards the Light.

Make your life a mass of divine radiance. *Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya.* Make of yourself a radiant light. Be a light unto yourself and a lamp unto the feet of others. Fill your life with the effulgence of the divine quality that is your birthright. That is the central thrust of the message that beloved and worshipful Holy Master, Gurudev, has left for us—for our *being* and *doing* and *living*. God bless you!

## THE CALL OF SHANMUKHA

Radiant Immortal Atman! Beloved and blessed children of the Divine! Members of the spiritual family of beloved and worshipful Gurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, gathered in his spiritual presence this early morning! This morning you have contemplated the Eternal, you have contemplated the Divine, in chanting His Divine Name, in silent inner prayer, through *kirtan* and meditation. You have contemplated that which is, that which ever was and ever shall be—beginningless, endless, infinite and eternal. May the grace of that supreme Divine Reality shower upon you!

We have entered the second day of the auspicious six-day worship of Lord Muruga or Saravanabhava, Karttikeya, Subrahmanya, Shanmukha. Shanmukha means one who is six-faced. Etymologically and metaphysically He is regarded as having six faces. *Shad* means six, *mukha* means face, and when these two coalesce, according to grammatical rules, they become Shanmukha, the six-faced.

Esoterically we may regard "six-faced" as being spelt six-phased. He has six phases or six aspects in which He manifests Himself. All of them represent grace. One represents protection. Another represents benediction. A third represents encouragement: "Do not fear when I am here. Why do you fear?" Others represent auspiciousness, benign compassion and the light of wisdom. Each one of these six facets of

Shanmukha manifests, reflects and radiates a certain sublime quality of the Supreme Being, a certain sublime quality of the Divine. They are qualities that mean something to us, mean something to the individual soul that is engaged in this life's journey.

The individual soul, when awakened, .knows that the end of this journey is not death, that it is spiritual perfection, that it is liberation, that it is the attainment of immortality and that death has no meaning in the light of this fact, this great truth. Immortality is the birthright of each individual soul precisely because it is a part of the Universal Soul, Which is the Eternal Reality, the one and the only eternal, unchanging, ever-present Reality. This experienced truth has established the fact that our being is that which is timeless, beyond time, eternal and that our being is imperishable, indestructible and immortal. There can be no question of any death for the indestructible. There can be no death for the immortal.

The body is mortal, but the light that shines within the body is endless and immortal. The body is born, but the Being within, the Indweller, the *vinasyatsu avinasyantam* (imperishable within the perishable), is *ajah,* unborn. The Being within is *nitya,* eternal, *sasvata,* permanent. It is unborn, eternal and permanent. It is *purana* (ancient), beyond time, beginningless. Ancient means whose beginning is not known. Therefore, they call It *anadi* (beginningless), *sanatana* (eternal).

By these terms, the dweller within the perishable body has been characterised by the great World Teacher Lord Krishna in chapter two of His Gita wisdom

teachings. He is unborn, He is eternal, He is permanent, He is timeless. That is what you are, and death has no meaning for that Being Who is beyond time and Who is birthless. There is death only for that which is born. For the unborn there can be no death. *Jatasya hi dhruvo mrityuh*—death is certain for that which is born, *jatasya,* but for that which is unborn, *ajah,* there can be no question or death. So death holds no meaning for the Immortal Being that you are. And this journey of life has as its destiny the everlasting Life Which is ever there.

The divine destiny of man is once again to regain the full experience of his perfect nature. That this is a possibility has been proven again and again in each generation, throughout thousands of years. It has been proved again and again by the self-experience of the seers and sages who proclaimed the great declaration "*amritasya putrah* (children of Immortality)." The experience of this great declaration, that we are children of Immortality, has been kept up by the great souls that have graced each generation, keeping alive and bright this great, radiant and effulgent light of spiritual experience, *aparoksha'nubhuti.* These great souls are the wealth of humanity. They are the wealth of the world. They are indeed the eternal benediction, the eternal grace that God constitutes.

And each face of Shanmukha radiantly expresses one aspect of His all-gracious, all-auspicious, all-benign nature, granting fearlessness and strength to His devotees. We invoke, therefore, this all-graceful,

all-gracious, all-grace filled manifestation of the Supreme, the *anugraha* of Bhagavan Sankara (the grace of Lord Siva) which was bestowed upon the celestial beings to lead them to victory in their confrontation and conflict with the powers of darkness. He says: "Come, I will lead you to victory. Follow Me. Be of My great gathering. I will lead you to victory." This being your divine, everlasting destiny, what is there to fear, what is there to worry about? There is only one thing to be done—to work.

A poet has declared: "Dust thou art and to dust thou returnest was not spoken of the soul." In a very explicit way, this line brings out this great Vedantic truth, the metaphysical truth of the immortality of the real Being within, the spirit of man. Therefore, the poet says that with hope and courage work on: "Heart within and God overhead." Be sure, the great Presence will grant you victory in this task. Therefore, "Heart within"—be of brave heart. Be courageous. Be heroic in this struggle towards your coveted destiny. Do not miss it. Do not be foolish. Do not be one who sits on the wayside and weeps just because one has fallen.

The Upanishads say: "What if you have fallen? Get up!" They say: "*uttishthata, uttishthata* (arise, arise)!" That too is the call of Subrahmanya. That is the call of Shanmukha. "Why are you running away cowardly, scattering yourself in confusion? O, ye celestials, come, rally around! Come, come, follow Me! I shall take you to victory." And then they did rally around. They said: "You are *deva senapati* (commander of the celestial

forces). You are our leader. You are our commander. Our forces are now gathered together. Even though routed, because of Your call we now have not lost heart. We rally around and we shall follow you." Thus He leads them to victory.

That is the entire episode of Skanda Shashthi and the worship of Lord Karttikeya, Shanmukha, Skanda, Subrahmanya. Just as nine days were set apart for the worship of the Divine as the great Cosmic Power, as the great Mother, Bhagavati, Devi, Durga, even so, six days are set apart for that same power manifest as the commanding leader of the celestial forces. He is the divine commander. He dwells within you as the power of determination. He dwells within you as the power of resolute thought. He dwells within you as the power of concentration upon the task you are undertaking. He dwells within you as the power of dedication to the ideal that you have chosen. He dwells within you as endless hope and courage. These are all the *daivi sampada.* He dwells within you as all that represents the divine within you, the divine that you are.

To invoke Him, therefore, is to answer the call "*uttishthata!* Stand up! Arise! *jagrata!* Be ever awake and alert! Do not again lapse into slumber! *Uttishthata jagrata prapya varan nibodhata* (Arise, awake, having reached the wise become enlightened)."

That is the spirit of Skanda Shashthi. That is the call of the Upanishads. That is your heritage. Courage is your birthright, not fear. Hope is your birthright, not

despair. Resolution is your birthright, not vascillation or weakness.

Thus, we offer our homage to the commander of the celestial forces, that great Being Who dwells within you as all that is positive, creative, all that is divine, which ensures success in your idealism and life spiritual. God bless you!



# THE UNIVERSAL PRAYER

O Adorable Lord of Mercy and Love!
Salutations and prostrations unto Thee.
Thou art Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute.
Thou art Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient.
Thou art the Indweller of all beings.

Grant us an understanding heart,
Equal vision, balanced mind,
Faith, devotion and wisdom.
Grant us inner spiritual strength
To resist temptations and to control the mind.
Free us from egoism, lust, greed, hatred, anger and jealousy.
Fill our hearts with divine virtues.

Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms.
Let us serve Thee in all these names and forms.
Let us ever remember Thee.
Let us ever sing Thy glories.
Let Thy Name be ever on our lips.
Let us abide in Thee for ever and ever.

—Swami Sivananda